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ABSTRACT

This executive summary of "Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 1998" notes the structure, highlights, and the reasoning behind the full report. The string of violent incidents that occurred in the 1997-98 school year has refocused the American public's attention on school crime and safety. As the Departments of Justice and Education responded to President Clinton's request of a report on school violence with the "Annual Report on School Safety: 1998," the statistics agencies of those departments produced this companion report, which identifies a broad range of indicators on school crime and safety to be reported annually. The full report provides a profile of school crime and safety in the United States and describes the characteristics of the victims of these crimes. It is organized as a series of indicators, with each indicator presenting data on different aspects of school crime and safety. There are five sections: (1) nonfatal student victimization-student reports; (2) violence and crime at school-public school principal/disciplinarian reports; (3) violent deaths at school; (4) nonfatal teacher victimization at school-teacher reports; and (5) school environment. This executive summary provides highlights of all five indicators. The table of contents of the full report and ordering information are included at the end. (JMD)

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October 1998

Executive Summary

Indicators of School Crime and Safety 1998

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Foreword

The string of tragic violent incidents that occurred in school year 1997-1998 has refocused the American public's attention on school crime and safety. When the first events occurred, it became clear that there was no single source of information about crime and violence in the nation's schools, and President Clinton called on the Departments of Justice and Education to produce an annual report card on school violence. The Departments responded to that request by producing the *Annual Report on School Safety: 1998* to inform educators, parents and students about the current nature of crime in schools and about programs schools and school systems have instituted to work towards making schools safer.

At the same time, the statistical agencies of the two departments identified a broader range of indicators on school crime and safety to be reported annually. This report, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 1998*, is a joint effort by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics. It is meant to provide detailed statistical information supporting the Annual Report. This series will provide the President, Congress, and the public with an analysis of the latest and best national data on school crime and safety in the United States.

In addition to providing this new report on school safety and crime, the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics have initiated new data collection efforts that will provide even more timely and accurate statistics on this issue in years to come. These efforts will include a more regularly conducted School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey scheduled now for 1999 and every two years thereafter, and a new biennial school-based survey starting in 2000 that will collect data on crime and discipline problems in our nation's schools.

We hope that this and subsequent reports will help inform the President, Congress, and the public on our nation's progress in providing our children with safe places to live and learn.

Pascal D. Forgione, Jr., Ph.D.
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Education Statistics

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Finally, the authors would like to thank Amanda Miller of the Education Statistics Services Institute and Marilyn Marbrook, Chief of Publication and Electronic Dissemination at BJS, assisted by Yvonne Boston and Jayne Robinson, for their assistance in preparing this document for publication and dissemination.

Highlights

Schools should be safe and secure places for all students, teachers, and staff members. Without a safe learning environment, teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn. Recent efforts by schools, local authorities, and the state and federal governments have prompted the nation to focus on improving the safety of American schools. It is the hope that all children will be able to go to and from school and be at school without fearing for their safety or the safety of their friends and teachers. Judging progress toward providing safer schools requires establishing good indicators on the current state of school crime and safety and periodically monitoring and updating these indicators.

This report, the first in a series of annual reports on school crime and safety from the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics, presents the latest available data on school crime and student safety. The report provides a profile of school crime and safety in the United States and describes the characteristics of the victims of these crimes. It is organized as a series of indicators, with each indicator presenting data on different aspects of school crime and safety. The report has five sections:

- Nonfatal Student Victimization — Student Reports
- Violence and Crime at School — Public School Principal/Disciplinarian Reports
- Violent Deaths at School
- Nonfatal Teacher Victimization at School — Teacher Reports
- School Environment.

Each section contains a set of indicators that, taken as a whole, describe a distinct aspect of school crime and safety.

The indicators rely on data collected by a variety of federal departments and agencies including the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Center for Education Statistics, the National Center for Health Statistics, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Because the report relies on so many different data sets, the age groups and the time periods analyzed can vary from indicator to indicator. Readers should keep this in mind as they compare data from different indicators. Furthermore, while every effort has been made to keep key definitions consistent across indicators, different surveys sometimes use different definitions, such as those for specific crimes and "at school." (Readers should consult the glossary of terms in appendix C of the full report for the specific definitions used in each survey.) Therefore caution should be used in making comparisons between results from different data sets. Descriptions of these data sets are located in appendix B of the full report. Some of the key findings from the various sections of this report follow. (All comparisons in this report were statistically significant at the 0.05 level. See appendix B of the full report for details on the methods used here.)

Nonfatal Student Victimization — Student Reports

In 1996, students ages 12 through 18 were victims of about 255,000 incidents of nonfatal serious violent crime at school and about 671,000 incidents away from school. These numbers indicate that when students were away from school they were more likely to be victims of nonfatal serious violent crime including rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault — than when they were at school (Indicator 1).

- The percentages of 12th graders who have been injured (with or without a weapon) at school have not changed notably over the past 20 years, although the percentages who have been threatened with injury (with a weapon or without a weapon) show a very slight overall upward trend (Indicator 3).

- In 1996, 5% of all 12th graders reported that they had been injured with a weapon such as a knife, gun, or club during the past 12 months while they were at school that is, inside or outside the school building or on a school bus and 12% reported that they had been injured on purpose without a weapon while at school (Indicator 3).

- Students were differentially affected by crime according to where they lived. In 1996, 12- through 18-year-old students living in urban areas were more vulnerable to serious violent crime than were students in suburban and rural areas both at and away from school. However, student vulnerability to theft in 1996 was similar in urban, suburban, and rural areas both at and away from school (Indicator 1).

Violence and Crime at School — Public School Principal/Disciplinarian Reports

In 1996-97, 10% of all public schools reported at least one serious violent crime to the police or a law enforcement representative. Principals' reports of serious violent crimes included murder, rape or other type of sexual battery, suicide, physical attack or fight with a weapon, or robbery. Another 47% of public schools reported a less serious violent or non-violent crime (but not a serious violent one). Crimes in this category include physical attack or fight without a weapon, theft/larceny, and vandalism. The remaining 43% of public schools did not report any of these crimes to the police (Indicator 6).

- Elementary schools were much less likely than either middle or high schools to report any type of crime in 1996-97. They were much more likely to report vandalism (31%) than any of the other crimes (19% or less) (Indicator 7).

- At the middle and high school levels, physical attack or fight without a weapon was generally the most commonly reported crime in 1996-97 (9 and 8 per 1,000 students, respectively). Theft or larceny was more common at the high school than the middle school level (6 versus 4 per 1,000 students) (Indicator 7).

Violent Deaths at School

Seventy-six students were murdered or committed suicide at school during the combined 1992-93 and 1993-94 school years (the latest period for which data are available). (For this indicator, "at school" includes on school property, on the way to or from school, and while attending or traveling to or from an official school-sponsored event.) Nonstudent violent deaths also occurred at school. During this period, there were 105 violent deaths at school of which 29 involved nonstudents (Indicator 8).

- Most murders and suicides among young people occurred while they were away from school. In the combined 1992 and 1993 calendar years, 7,357 young people ages 5 through 19 were murdered, and 4,366 committed suicide in all locations (Indicator 8).

- Students in urban schools had a higher level of risk of violent death at school than their peers in suburban or rural schools. The estimated rate of school-associated violent death for students in urban schools was nine times greater than the rate for students in rural schools and two times greater than that for students in suburban schools during the combined 1992-93 and 1993-94 school years (Indicator 8).

Nonfatal Teacher Victimization at School — Teacher Reports

Over the 5-year period from 1992 to 1996, teachers were victims of 1,581,000 nonfatal crimes at school, including 962,000 thefts and 619,000 violent crimes (rape or sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated and simple assault) (Indicator 9). This translates into about 316,000 nonfatal crimes per year over this time period.

- In the period from 1992 to 1996, middle and junior high school teachers were more likely to be victims of violent crime (most of which were simple assaults) than senior high school teachers, who in turn were more likely to be victims of violent crime than elementary school teachers (Indicator 9).

- In the 1993-94 school year, 12% of all elementary and secondary school teachers were threatened with injury by a student, and 4% were physically attacked by a student. This represented about 341,000 teachers who were victims of threats of injury by students and 120,000 teachers who were victims of attacks by students that year (Indicator 10).

School Environment

Between 1989 and 1995, there were increases in the percentages of students feeling unsafe while they were at school and while they were going to and from school. In 1989, 6% of students ages 12 through 19 sometimes or most of the time feared they were going to be attacked or harmed at school. By 1995, this percentage had risen to 9%. During the same period, the percentage of students fearing they would be attacked while traveling to and from school rose from 4% to 7% (Indicator 12).

- Between 1989 and 1995, the percentage of students ages 12 through 19 who avoided one or more places at school for fear of their own safety increased, from 5% to 9%. In 1995, this percentage represented 2.1 million students (Indicator 13).

• Between 1989 and 1995, the percentage of students who reported that street gangs were present at their schools increased. In 1989, 15% of students reported gangs in their schools. By 1995, this percentage had risen to 28% (Indicator 14).

• There was a decline between 1993 and 1996 in the percentage of male high school seniors who reported carrying a weapon to school at least 1 day within the 4 weeks before the survey the percentage fell from 14% in 1993 to 9 percent in 1996. However, there was little change in the percentage of female students who reported doing so (from 2 to 3%) (Indicator 11).

• Although 12th graders were less likely to use alcohol at school than at home or at parties, in 1996 about 8% of 12th graders had consumed alcohol at school in the past 12 months (Indicator 16).

• The percentage of 12th graders who had taken various illegal drugs at school in the previous 12 months declined between 1976 and 1992. However, since 1992, use of marijuana and stimulants at school has increased (Indicator 17).

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